THE DEVALAYA

ITS AIMS AND OBJECTS

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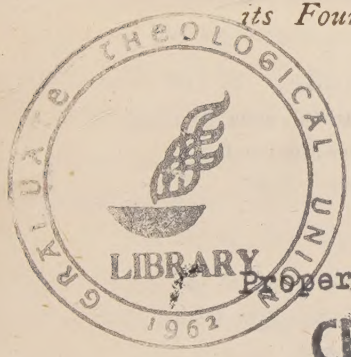
THE DEVALAYA

ITS AIMS AND OBJECTS

With a short sketch of the
Life and Work of
its Founder.



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Preface

The Devalaya has been drawing a part of the public attention for over a year and a half. Its weekly services and addresses, its monthly meetings and its occasional festivals are advertised in the dailies and often draw large and earnest audiences. Its trust deed and an account of its aims and objects will, therefore, it is hoped, be welcome to many. But perhaps they would not be quite intelligible without a sketch of the life and labours of the founder, Srijut Sevabrata Sasipada Banurji. Such a sketch therefore forms a part of this pamphlet. Mr. Banurji has been an incessant and faithful worker from his very boyhood and his activity has always been characterised by method and directed to fixed, definite aims. That he would found an institution like the Devalaya seems to have been somewhat of a necessity. One who has watched his doings from youth to old age could almost prophesy that he would to this. This will be evident even from the imperfect sketch that follows,—one which mentions only a few of his numerous

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activities. In 1903, when the Barahanagar Widow's Home was closed on account of its founder's failing health, and the public heard nothing of Mr. Banurji for some time, it seemed that his labours were over and that it remained for him only to await the Divine call to a higher world. But anon we heard of the re-organisation of the Barahanagar Institute, of his endowments to it and other charitable institutions, and then came the crowning effort of his life, the Devalaya, which, as Sir Gurudas Banurji said the other day, is solving one of the most important problems of the day. The strength of the spirit has overcome the weakness of the flesh and God's purpose has been fulfilled. It is hoped that the following pages will draw fresh sympathy and co-operation to the sacred cause of the Devalaya and remove the misunderstanding which still seems to linger in some minds as to the aims and objects of the Institution.

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF SEVABRATA SRIJUT SASIPADA BANURJI.

Family and Early Life

SEVABRATA SRIJUT Sasipada Banurji was born on the 2nd day of February, 1840 at Barahanagar near Calcutta. The town seems to have been an important one even before it got its present celebracy from the mills and factories established there by the Dutch and the English. It was so named after a Raja who reigned theres traces of whose palace are still pointed out by the inhabitants. The Banurji family of the place has been an influential one from many generations. It helped the British Government in settling the land-revenue of the place when it was first taken by them from the Dutch, and has always taken the lead in all matters of local interest. It owes its settlement in the town to a saint named Akinchan Brahmachari who came from East Bengal to

live on the banks of the Ganges and practise his austerities and devotional exercises there. He seems to have been held in profound reverence by his fellow townsmen, and the spot where his cottage stood, is still reverently pointed out. The Brahmachari induced his brother's son, Ramram Banurjee, to settle near him and it is from this Ramram that the Banurjis of Barahanagar are directly descended. Sasipada's father, Rajkumar Banurji, was a public-spirited man, and was one of the founders of the first English school at Barahahanagar. He left four sons, of whom Sasipada is the third. None of the other brothers, of whom the two eldest ones died comparatively young, attained to anything like Sasipada's activity or celebracy, though all sharing more or less the father's public spirit. Sasipada lost his father while he was only in his fifth year, and his education devolved chiefly upon his mother, a lady of great strength of character, though one who, according to the custom that prevailed in those days, had received no education. Though without any book-learning, however, the lady

watched her children at their lessons with a keen interest and seems to have had not a little influence in forming their characters, specially that of her third son. Young Banurji went through the usual Pathsala and High School courses, but, on account of the straitened circumstances of the family, had to leave school before passing the Matriculation Examination and take service as a teacher. When he was only twenty, an incident happened which may be regarded as the beginning of Mr. Banurji's career as a reformer, and which also shows that his conversion to theism from the polytheistic and idolatrous faith of his boyhood, was the result rather of an inward growth than of the influence of the teachings of any reforming body like the Brahma Samaj. Shortly after his initiation into the daily duties of a Brahman by his family *guru*, he complained of the unsuitableness of the *mantra* the *guru* had given him. He felt it as unsuitable for him, for he had already given up the ceremonial worship of gods and had become a spiritual worshipper of the Supreme Being. The *guru*, with a

praiseworthy appreciation of his pupil's high her spiritual status, changed the ordinary *mantra* for '*Anando Brahmeti*' from the 'Bhrigu Valli' *of the Taittiria Upanishad.* This change of *mantra* is a most unusual occurrence, for it is never allowed in the case of householders. Mr. Banurji has always looked upon his initiation by his family *guru* with the Brahma *mantra* as his real initiation into theism. It infused a new life into him and he felt comforted by it, and so when latterly he joined the Brahma Samaj, he did not undergo any further initiation. His initiation was preceded by his marriage. As a Kulin, belonging to the established Brahmanical aristocracy, he might get a large sum of money from the bride's father as an honorarium for marrying his daughter; but young Banurji scrupulously avoided all money-transactions on this solemn and sacred occasion. Mrs. Banurji was then, as was usual in those days, quite a child, and without any education. But her husband had already in his head a pretty well-matured scheme of reform, and he knew well how to begin his reform-work. True reform,

like true charity, begins at home. Young Banurji's first care after marriage was to educate his child-wife and bring her up in those principles of reform, religious and social, in which he had already put his faith. Being the member of a large joint family, managed under the narrowest and most superstitious principles, he found this task to be a very difficult one. The idea of a woman acquiring book-learning was a very unpopular one in those days, and scarcely less unpopular was that of her taking lessons from—in fact having anything to do with—her husband during the day. But Banurji's perseverance and steadiness overcame all obstacles, so that he succeeded gradually not only in imparting the elements of education to his wife, but in establishing a sort of school in his family-house for the education of girls and grown-up women including widows,—a school which was the beginning of all those activities for the education of woman which characterised Mr. Banurji's later life.

In 1864 Mr. Banurji was blessed with a son, his first child. But the child died shortly

after its birth in the nursery in consequence of the wholesale violation of all sanitary laws which characterised the lying-in-room of those days and which has caused and is still causing the death of so many thousands of innocents in this country. This incident caused Mr. Banurji to put his hand to nursery-reform and he was successful in effecting the needful improvement in his own family, not, however, without undergoing many trials and difficulties. His example has been followed far and wide in this province.

Temperance Work

Mr. Banurji then turned his attention to Temperance Work. The woes of his native town, caused by drink and drunkards, rent his heart and he launched into his work with singular ardour and energy. A Temperance Society was established at the town on the 27th March, 1864, and Mr. Banurji became its Secretary from the second sitting. Not content with merely holding meetings, the young Secretary brought himself face to face with the evil he had resolved to combat. He visited

both individual drunkards in their homes and drinking clubs when they were in full swing. He preached to them on the evils of drinking, and caused essays to be written on these evils, awarding prizes to successful competitors. He also organised a "Band of Hope," a union of boys pledged to temperance principles. He threw himself heart and soul into the work and gave his days and nights to it. Such hearty and energetic work could not but have its effect. The whole town was agitated to its very bottom ; the temperance movement became the talk of the whole place and the terror of the drunkard. More tangible results soon followed. The victims of drink began one by one to give up their habits and many of them even joined their benefactor in the good work he had taken up as his mission. Gradually most of the known drunkards of the place gave up their ruinous habits and many of them joined a Reading Club which Mr. Banurji established on the very site where there was formerly a Drinking Club. To be more precise, the Drinking Club itself was converted into a Reading Club. When the Working Men's Club of

Barahanagar was established later on, tota abstinence was made a condition of membership, and great and far-reaching were the results of this combined movement for temperance and the improvement of the working classes. In every meeting there came forward fresh numbers of men confessing their intemperate habits and taking temperance pledges. It can be easily imagined that such earnest and energetic activity on the part of Mr. Banurji must have called forth a corresponding opposition from the friends and advocates of drink and this was exactly the case. The young temperance worker was assailed on all sides by those whose pleasure or interest was affected by his labours. Taunts and abuse were hurled on him from all quarters and the revelry at drinking-clubs and wine-shops received an added zest from the fresh excitements furnished by reviling and defaming the Secretary of the Temperance Society Attempts at sullying his good name by libellous reports and even putting him into physical difficulties were discussed by the infuriated priests of Bacchus. Even the meetings of the

Society were occasionally disturbed by visits from drunkards and wine-sellers. A wine-dealer, who thought that his interest was affected by the reformer and his friends refusing to have in the same boat with them a servant of his with a basketful of bottled wine, was so far incensed thereby as to bring against them a case of abduction alleging that they had probably murdered his man. Mr. Banurji and his friends were forced to spend one night under police surveillance. Next day, the man, represented as abducted and possibly murdered but really concealed by his master, being produced alive and unharmed, led to the dismissal of the case and the release of the temperance workers.

Connection with the Brahma Samaj

In 1865, Mr. Banurji formally joined the Brahma Samaj, established a Samaj in his native town and discarded his Brahmanical thread, feeling that as he had given up *deva*-worship and the distinction of castes, he ought not to wear the badge that indicates that form of worship and that erroneous and injurious distinction. This raised quite

a storm in the town and the intrepid reformer had to pay the price of his courage and consistency not only by being excommunicated from the orthodox society, but by being subjected to a variety of persecutions too numerous to detail,—persecutions which filled his daily life with petty annoyances, and which led him ultimately to leave his large ancestral house, wherein six generations had lived together, and remove to a house where he could live with his reformed family in full accordance with his refined ideas of domestic and social life. It may be mentioned here that though belonging to a reformed sect, and always allying himself with the most advanced party in that sect, Mr. Banurji has always, on the one hand, regarded and called himself a Hindu, and on the other, actively sympathised and co-operated with all religious bodies. While he has always paid the honours of a spiritual father to the orthodox Hindu *guru* who initiated him into Brahma-*mantra*, devotees of all sects have, at the same time, been always welcome guests at his house, and he has unreservedly and enthusiastically joined in

their devotions. While in England, he joined in the prayers of various Christian denominations and preached from their pulpits. Though seceding from the Adi Brahma Samaj with Mr. Kesavchandra Sen, he never sympathised with Mr. Sen's exclusion of conservative ministers bearing the badge of caste from Brahma Samaj pulpits, and in 1867 he accomplished the astounding feat of simultaneously placing the two rival Brahma leaders, Maharshi Devendranath and Brahmananda Kesavchandra, as well as a most conservative minister, the late Babu Becharam Chaturji, who had not discarded his Brahmanical thread, on the pulpit of the Samaj at Barahanagar. This took place when the conflict between the two parties was raging most furiously in Calcutta, and feelings between them were most bitter. On two other occasions he brought together the above two rival leaders and placed them on his family-pulpit. Many of Mr. Banurji's fellow-believers have failed to understand what has always seemed to them a strange combination of fidelity to his own creed and an all-comprehensive toleration of creeds

other than and diametrically opposed to his.

Work among the masses

The condition of the masses, the thousands of working people employed in the mills of his native town, soon drew the sympathies of our reformer. Moved by their sufferings and actuated by a holy desire to save them from the fearful temptations that surrounded them on all sides, he, on the 1st of November 1866, called together a large number of them and in a long speech tried to impress upon them the great importance of making organised efforts for improving their condition. The first result of the conference was the establishment of night schools for working men and boys at Barahanagar and some of the neighbouring towns. The movement proved very successful, the merchants whose employees attended the schools actively helping their maintenance and bearing testimony to their efficiency by declaring that those of their hands who attended Sasi Babu's school were the very people that were found to be most careful and painstaking in their work. A

step forward in organisation was taken by the establishment in August 1870, of the "Workingmen's Club," which continued for a long time to be the central body and the rallying place for all who came under the influence of the movement. The Club held its meetings at Mr. Banurji's house and at the houses of the members and great was the enthusiasm displayed not only by the men, but also by their mothers, wives and sisters on those occasions. The meetings were frequently attended and addressed by sympathising visitors from Calcutta. Lectures on various subjects, chiefly of a moral and practical character, were delivered in these meetings, and the effect of these began soon to be visible in the thrifty and temperate habits and the improved morals of those who heard them. Many of them even joined the Sadharan Dharma Sabha, of which we shall speak later on, and took an active part and evinced a hearty interest in the devotional exercises connected with it. Women's meetings were occasionally held at the house of Mr. Banurji and lantern exhibitions and other entertainments organised

by him in order to awaken the interest of the working people in the movement. These entertainments included occasional excursions to interesting places. To these various efforts are to be added the personal interest which Mr. Banurji took in those who came under his influence,—an interest which led him to visit them in their homes, sympathise with their joys and sorrows, attend their sick-beds, share their simple food and mix with them as a brother in utter forgetfulness of his high birth and position in society. After his return from England in 1872, he greatly extended the sphere of his activity for the masses by starting for them an illustrated monthly pice paper entitled the *Bharat Sramajivi*. Both the circulation and the influence of the paper were remarkable. No fewer than fifteen thousand copies—a marvellous number for those days—were turned out every month and the paper reached all classes of the working population and was seen in the hands of peasants in the remotest corners of the province. The Magistrates of all the districts of Bengal subscribed for it and friends and sympathisers were creat-

ed everywhere and helped in its circulation. The *Barahanagar Samachar*, a weekly paper started by Mr. Banurji in 1873, also represented the grievances of the working people and helped on their cause.

The work for the masses still continues notwithstanding Mr. Banurji's absence from the field of work. Lately he has placed Rupees two thousand in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj for organising lectures for working people on practical religion and morality.

It may be said that the present movement for the raising of the depressed classes had its beginning in the work for the masses just described, for the people who came under Mr. Banurji's influence included the lowest untouchable classes, e.g., Kaoras and Chandals.

English Visit

In 1871 Mr. Banurji visited England in company with his wife, the first Hindu lady to visit that country. He addressed several meetings in various parts of England and interested a large number of English ladies

and gentlemen in the welfare of the people of of this country. In many of those places branches of the National Indian Association of England for the social and moral improvement of the people of this country were established. After gaining valuable experience, and assured of the sympathy and co-operation of many philanthropic souls in his future labours, Mr. Banurji returned to his country to serve it with redoubled energy. While in England he was the guest of Miss Mary Carpenter, the famous philanthropist, who loved him as a mother and was his constant helper as long as she lived in all his endeavours for serving his countrymen. Mr. Banurji's youngest son, Mr. Albion Banurji, M.A., I. C. S., was born at Bristol during his parents' sojourn in England.

Sadharan Dharma Sabha

In March, 1873 Mr. Banurji inaugurated a unique movement. He established a religious association under the name of the Sadharan Dharma Sabha, which aimed at the union and mutual co-operation of the various religious

bodies of the country without at the same time any surrender of their peculiar doctrines and practices. We call it a unique movement, for we know of no previous attempt at the union which Mr Banurji endeavoured to bring about by his Sabha. For even any approach to it we must go so far back in history as the days of the Emperor Akbar, under whose imperial orders Hindu, Musalman and Christian preachers met together and freely expounded their respective faiths. We have no detailed record of the proceedings of those imperial assemblies. Perhaps they were the work of a single broad and sympathising soul far in advance of his time, and did not evoke any response in the assembled representatives of the opposed creeds. In the last century there have been many attempts at the union of various religious bodies on a common platform, such, for instance, as the free Religious Association of America and the Theistic Society founded in England at the time of Babu Kesavchandra Sen's visit to that country. Raja Rammohan Ray's Brahma Samaj also seems to have been, in its original form, such a union of

various religious bodies, for, while a form of service containing texts from the Hindu scriptures was held there, we hear also of Eurasian lads singing English hymns there now and then. But all these attempts at religious union proceeded upon clearly defined principles of unity and ignored points of difference. In joining these unions, the members of the different religious bodies were understood as forgetting for the time being the doctrines peculiar to them, however true and valuable they might hold them to be. In the meetings held under the auspices of these movements, the assembled representatives of the different faiths could speak of such things only as were held in common by all. Any unguarded reverting to or emphasis on one's peculiarities would be felt as a jarring element and either openly or secretly resented. Mr. Banurji justly felt that the purposes of universal religion could not be rightly served by unions under such conditions. If men of various faiths were to be gathered in the same hall and encouraged to fraternise with one another, the spiritual atmosphere of such a

hall must not be made too close. It must be such as every one, with all his idiosyncrasies of belief and manner, could freely breathe in. If fraternisation meant anything, it meant or at any rate involved a respect for and toleration of a brother's peculiarities. The only limitations to each one's freedom that could be laid down were that no one should attack another. Hostile feelings, either in the speaker or in the hearers, could and should be avoided. On such extremely broad and highly rational bases therefore—bases which no previous organisation had ventured to build upon—Mr. Banurji established his Sadharan Dharma Sabha. Its two main features were, first, a spiritual union, held every week, of the followers of various religions on the basis of commonly-accepted principles—a union in which prayers and other spiritual exercises took place and were joined in by all ; and, secondly, a platform for the preaching of diverse opinions by their advocates, a platform where the most perfect freedom and toleration were allowed consistently with brotherly feeling and general co-operation, for no one was allowed to vilify

or ridicule the beliefs and practices of another. The harmonious way in which the two schemes combined in the main object of the Sabha worked together, was wonderful and bespeaks not a little tact and skill on the part of the organiser of the movement.

Sasipada Institute

In 1876 Mr. Banurji built a beautiful public hall at Barahanagar in front of his own house (now the property of his eldest daughter) mainly at his own expense and partly with the help of subscriptions gathered mostly from friends in England. This hall has since been the centre of the intellectual life of the town. Lately Mr. Banurji has placed the hall in the hands of a body of trustees. He has made over his own private library and museum to them and provided funds for the maintenance and improvement of the Institute. A variety of philanthropic work is carried on in connection with it, the chief of which are the maintenance of a big library and the delivery of regular lectures on all subjects of public interest.

Work for Hindu Widows

We shall now mention the work by which Mr. Banurji is perhaps best known,—his labours to better the condition of the Hindu widow. Mr. Banurji's sympathies for the widow were aroused by witnessing a horrible act of widow-murder in his own ancestral house in the same way in which Raja Rammohan Ray's determination to have the horrible *suttee* rite abolished was formed by the spectacle of one of his own sisters-in-law burnt forcibly in the funeral pile of her husband. When Mr. Banurji was a boy of eight or nine, a young widow closely related to him went astray, but was forcibly brought back by some of the youngmen of the family. She was locked up in a room, her mouth gagged and she was violently beaten night after night till on the third night she died, and before the night was over her dead body was cremated and it was given out that she had killed herself by hanging. This dreadful scene produced an indelible impression on young Banurji's mind, making him realise the miserable plight of the widow in Hindu society and impelling him from his earliest

years to labour for the ameolioration of her lot. The cause of the remarriage of widows found in him a most hearty and active supporter and he has got no fewer than forty widows remarried in different times of his life. One of the first of these was his own niece, whom he rescued from her orthodox relatives and got remarried under circumstances full of pathos and adventures of a romantic kind. Mr. Banurji himself, when he lost his first wife,married a widow intentionally, refusing offers of spinsters made to him. But though an active supporter of the cause of widow-remarriage Mr. Banurji felt from the very beginning that the re-marriage of widows, with which our earlier reformers were contented, only partially solved the widow problem. He saw that in many cases the remarriage of widows was neither possible nor desirable, and yet the condition of such widows was miserable in the extreme and called for the efforts of reformers and philanthropists. There was thus a larger problem than that of widow-remarriage,—a problem that could be solved only by organised efforts to *educate* the widow. Ever since the

re-marriage of his niece, Mr. Banurji's home had become, on a small scale, a home for widows coming under his shelter to be educated and helped to remarry. He had also, for many years, kept up an agitation in the country, and partly in England, in favour of the cause of widow-remarriage through the distribution of pamphlets, leaflets and articles in periodicals. But these efforts took a systematic shape and concentrated themselves in the establishment of the Barahanagar Hindu Widow's Home in 1887. This Home was excellently managed by Mr. Banurji for sixteen years with the help of his good and able wife, the second Mrs. Banurji. It drew the sympathy and support of all classes of the community, the orthodox and the heterodox alike besides that of the government and of philanthropic ladies and gentlemen in England. The Home combined academical and practical teaching, the latter preponderating over the former, and many a young woman now blesses the 'father' and the 'mother' who so successfully took the place of their natural parents and helped them to become mistresses

of happy homes or to earn their livelihood by honest labour. It was closed, not for want of support, but because when the founder's health failed, and premature death carried away the dear and accomplished daughter who had been carefully trained to take charge of it, no individual or public body could be found to take up the task of managing and maintaining it on the broad and unsectarian lines laid down and so successfully followed by him. Latterly Mr. Banurji tried an extension of the work of the Widow's home in a new and most useful line and was to a certain extent successful. He introduced a system of imparting education to widows and other ladies in their own homes. Students making satisfactory progress in their studies or helping others to learn were granted small stipends to encourage them in their labours. No fewer than fourteen centres of instruction in and about Barahanagar were established and the work went on for two years. But like so many good works it at last failed for want of support. This was, however, the beginning of the scheme, afterwards adopted by Government, of appointing

lady teachers going about and teaching the inmates of the zenana. Government seem to have been greatly concerned at the close of the Widow's Home. Shortly after its abolition the Commissioner of the Presidency Division, under orders from the Government of Bengal, invited Mr. Banurji to his presence and earnestly inquired whether it was possible to re-open it. He assured that officer that the state of his health made it impossible for him to re-open it. On this the Government felt that the gap must be filled up as best it could be, and the result was the opening of training classes and schools for preparing lady teachers and the institution of scholarships for drawing and encouraging students. In Bengal the work of the Barahanagar Widow's Home has been partly taken up by the Mahila Silpasram lately established by Mrs. P. Mukerji, and at Poona, Madras, Mysore and other places Homes for the education of widows have been opened on the same lines that were laid down by the founder of the Home at Barahanagar. All these institutions have shared the active sym-

pathy of the pioneer of the noble work, who only the other day sent a donation of Rs 500 to the Poona Widow's Home. He has also placed another five hundred rupees in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj who are helping the education of a young widow from the interest of the amount,

The Devalaya

We shall now speak of the last of Mr. Banurji's chief activities,—that by which he will perhaps be better known to posterity than any of those that have preceded it. We mean the institution established by him on the first of January, 1908, under the name of the Devalaya. It is a revival, in a somewhat remodelled form, and on a more permanent basis, of the Sadharan Dharma Sabha which he had established in 1873 and of which we have already spoken. The Devalaya is an "Association for devotional exercises and for literary, scientific, philanthropic and charitable work" on a basis common to all the principal religions current in the country. It

provides a weekly religious service on an unsectarian basis,—a service in which worshippers of all denominations may join, and in its weekly and other occasional meetings for lectures, it promotes the free expression of all religious views, however divergent, in a catholic and charitable spirit. It aims at the union and mutual co-operation of the various religious bodies of the country without at the same time any surrender of their peculiar doctrines and practices. It maintains a Chatuspathi, that is a class for teaching the *Sastras*, a library and a reading room and a monthly journal conducted on the same broad principles as the institution itself. Mr. Banurji has made over his own dwelling house, 210-3-2, Cornwallis Street, to a body of trustees for the use of the Devalaya. The upper rooms are let out to families having sympathy with the objects of the Devalaya, and the rent paid by them is spent by the trustees in maintaining the Devalaya and in promoting other philanthropic works. The Committee of the Devalaya consists of representatives of the orthodox Hindu society and of the three sections of the Brahma Samaj.

Discourses have been delivered by orthodox Hindus and orthodox Christians from their own standpoints as well as by Brahmas. Most people have found nothing inconsistent or objectionable in this, and the catholicity as well as the constant and varied activity of the Devalaya has drawn praise from many quarters. But there are some who seem to think that the catholicity of the Devalaya is too wide and verges upon the tolerance of untruth. It is even said that the two features of the institution just mentioned,—a purely theistic and unsectarian service, and the expression of divergent views,—views, for instance, possibly opposed to theism,—are at variance with each other. The founder of the Devalaya has never been convinced of this variance since the days of the Sadharan Dharma Sabha, nor are those so convinced who have the management of the Devalaya in their hands. A service in which followers of all religions can join cannot possibly be other than theistic, that is, addressed to the Supreme Being alone and excluding the use of images and addresses to persons believed as incarnations of God. In the

act of worshipping God, people cannot bear expressions jarring with their inmost beliefs and sentiments. But in other moods, in hearing discourses or reading books, for instance, they are—if they are not bigots—prepared to hear a good deal with which they do not agree. They are then in a more or less critical mood, and may accept or reject what they read or hear. If, therefore, one can read books containing much that he does not accept, or attend discourses delivered from standpoints not his own, there can be nothing objectionable in having a platform from which discourses expounding various and even conflicting opinions are permitted to be delivered. This seems quite plain to the founder of the Devalaya and to those friends of his who are helping him in carrying out his great idea. If the Brahma Samaj, to which Mr. Banurji belongs, were as catholic as the Devalaya, there would be no room for the latter. In fact its founder had actually proposed to place it in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj ; but the committee refused to conduct the institution on the broad

lines laid down by him. The Brahma Samaj, though it permits non-Brahmas in some cases to speak in its halls, does so only under the limitation that such speakers should not utter anything inconsistent with the declared principles of the Samaj. Places of worship and platforms under such limitations may be necessary for the proper discharge of denominational work and the preaching of denominational religion, and Mr. Banurji has all along been faithful and zealous in his adherence to his own denomination. But he has always felt that for promoting unsectarian religion and universal brotherhood, institutions wider in their scope and organisation than the existing churches, including the Brahma Samaj, are necessary. Such an institution is the Devalay, and its founder thinks that according to his conception of the Brahma Samaj, it is nothing but a Brahma institution or a Brahma Samaj, though it is not so in name. Its more comprehensive programme, should, he thinks, form part of the work of a universalistic Brahma Church. One may be faithful to his own views and yet learn much

from books and discourses expressing opinions conflicting with his. One may have objection to using images as helps to worship, but it would not be inconsistent with his views to hear what another person has to say in favour of using images. In such an exposition, he may even find much that he never thought of, though all the same differing from the speaker both in theory and practice. One may not accept Christ or Chaitanya as incarnations of God,and yet he may learn much from an exposition of the doctrine of incarnation by one holding such a belief. One may even discover in some cases that a professed believer and a professed unbeliever in incarnation differ more in the form and expression of their beliefs than in substance. Instances need not be multiplied. It is by the toleration of mutually conflicting opinions, by the mutual respect and co-operation of men holding different views, and by a wide system of culture that does not refuse to hear any opinion earnestly and honestly held, that the world is progressing towards unity and brotherhood. If the Devalaya, with the humble means at its disposal, can promote

such toleration, such co-operation and such culture, and thus be a factor, however small, in bringing about the unity and brotherhood after which we all aspire, its founder will always be remembered by posterity as one of the greatest benefactors of his kind.

THE TRUST-DEED OF THE DEVALAYA

An interesting ceremony took place on the 1st of January 1909, the first anniversary of the Devalaya. After a short service conducted by Mr. P. Ray Chaudhuri, Barrister-at-Law, one of the Secretaries of the institution, Sevabrata Babu Sasipada Banurji made over the charge of his house, 210-3-2, Cornwallis Street, to a board of trustees for use as a public institution. His trust-deed, a translation of which is given below, was read by Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhushan, another Secretary of the Devalaya. Pandit Tattvabhushan prefaced the reading of the document with a short speech, the substance of which is as follows :—

Before I read the trust-deed of the Devalaya, I beg leave to say a few words on what I conceive to be Mr. Banurji's object in founding the institution. I have been watching Mr. Banurji's religious, social and philanthropic activities from my young days and I have had special opportunities of ascertaining his views on religious and social subjects. In

him I see a combination,—very rare in the world,—of strict faithfulness to his own religion and deep respect for other systems of religion. Mr. Banurji is a staunch Brahma, and his Brahmaism is of a very progressive type. He seceded from the Adi Brahma Samaj with Kesavchandra Sen and his followers, and when the last schism in the Brahma Samaj took place, he was among the seceders and was one of the founders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. In this most progressive section of the Brahma Samaj, he has been in the forefront of progress, promoting and encouraging some of the most radical of reforms. But not withstanding this uncompromising fidelity to his own principles, he feels the deepest respect for the other systems of religion that prevail in the world, and has, in various ways, given expression to this respect in his public and private life. He thinks that notwithstanding the outward diversity seen in the chief systems of religion, religion is essentially one, and that this fundamental unity of religion should be made the basis of brotherly feeling and co-operation, so far as possible, among the follow-

ers of different religions. Strict faithfulness to one's own religion often leads to a fanatic intolerance of other religions. This intolerance is not rare even in the most liberal of all religions, Brahmaism. But Sasi Babu's faithfulness to Brahmaism, which brought upon him the severest persecution from his orthodox relatives and friends, has never prevented him from the heartiest fraternisation with men of other creeds and the closest co-operation with them, not only in social and philanthropic activities, but also in the sphere of practical religion. In 1873, he established in his native village of Barahnagar a religious association under the name of the Sadharan Dharma Sabha, in which men of various creeds, Brahmas, orthodox Hindus, Mahommedans and Christians, met together on a common basis and held devotional services and discussions. In my pamphlet entitled *Social Reform in Bengal: A side sketch*, I have given a detailed account of this movement. It was perhaps in advance of the time when it was established, for even some of the most progressive Brahmas could not sympathise with

it, and misunderstood and opposed it. Mr. Banurji's transfer on official business and want of competent workers led to its close after a short career. But Mr. Banurji never since gave up the idea which had led him to inaugurate the movement. He has been waiting for a more favourable opportunity to embody in a regular organisation his ideal of hearty fraternisatian and co-operation among the followers of different creeds. The Devalaya is not a revival of the old Sadharan Dharma Sabha in all details. But the spirit that led Mr. Banurji to establish the old institution is the same that has inspired the founding of the new, and the fundamental aims and object are also the same in both cases. The promotion of true religion and the establishment of unity is indeed the fundamental object of the institution. But as the same fundamental truth assumes various forms of expression, we must, to a great extent, respect and tolerate diversities in religion if we would bring about union among the followers of various creeds. I cannot say that either Mr. Banurji or any one else among us has fully solved the problem

in what particular way unity and diversity in religion can be combined. But at any rate, the Devalaya is an earnest experiment in that direction. We shall all meet here on a common basis ; but we shall also permit a good deal of variety of expression, variety of views, in our preachers and lecturers. But so far as I understand the matter, I think the diversity allowed will not be quite unlimited. For instance, it is provided in the trust-deed that the divine service to be held here will be purely theistic. It will be a spiritual and not a ceremonial worship. I think, therefore, that if a lecturer here were to advocate idolatry, the use of idols as helps to worship, he would act against the spirit of the trust-deed. We need not entertain any fear, therefore, that the broad basis on which the Devalaya is founded will any way lead to the encouragement or promotion of old-world and exploded errors. The wise provision in the trust-deed that no speaker shall vilify or ridicule any existing or future system of religion will lead all preachers and lecturers, as a rule, to advocate only what is acceptable to all. But we must all be pre-

pared to learn from one another, and should with that object in view, be quite ready to tolerate a good deal of diversity in views and expressions that cannot be avoided. But I need not anticipate what is already embodied in the trust-deed itself. May God enable every one of us connected with the Devalaya to help in the promotion of the high object which has led the founder to estabilsh the institution and devote to it all that he has ! During the last few years he has given away all his money, amounting to twelve thousand rupees, for various philanthropic purposes, and now he gives away his own dwelling house for the realisation of his most dearly-cherished idea,—thus obeying the divine injunction to give all for the kingdom of Heaven. May we all make a right use of his noble gift ! I now proceed to read to you my honoured friend's trust-deed.

The Trust-Deed.

I, Sasipada Bandyopadhyay, son of the late Rajkumar Bandyopadhyay, an inhabitant of Barahanagar in Thana Barahnagar, in the Sub-Registrarship of Kasipur in the district of

Twentyfour Parganas, at present living at 210-3-2, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, by caste a Brahmana and by profession a land-holder, have been, in trust and reliance on God, endeavouring to carry on various works connected with social reform and the general good of the country in my native village of Baraha, nagar for about half a century, but am now gradually getting personally incapable of continuing those works on account of old age I have therefore provided, as far as lies in my power, for those works to be continued having, on the 29th of September, 1905, appointed a number of trustees for their supervision and got the trust-deed registered at the Barahanagar Registrar's Office. I now feel the need of providing for the continuance of what little work I have tried to do in different departments in Calcutta. Accordingly, after remembering the holy name of God, I proceed to draw up this trust-deed with the object of keeping my own dwelling house in Calcutta as a trust-property.

2. In Calcutta I own a pucca four-storied dwelling house, 20-3-2, Cornwallis Street, and

two *cattahs* of land on which it stands. This is my only property in Calcutta. This property is worth about Rs. 14000 (fourteen thousand). It is described in the Calcutta Collectorate as holding No. 302, block 15, north division. The total rent of my land is As. 5, 3 pies. Thirty times of this rent, Rs. 9, 8 as. and 6 pies, having been paid to theCalcutta collectorate on the 1st March, 1887, this land has become rent-free. About this I got from the said collectorate a redemption-certificate-no. 112, on the 25th March of the year mentioned. This redemption was granted on the 20th May of 1887 as No. 322A, and is mentioned in the Board Return No. 9 of 1887. I purchased this piece of land for Rs. 800 (eight hundred only) in the name of my late second wife, Girijakumari Devi, from the late Mr. Anandamohan Bose, Barrister-at-law on the 27th september, 1885 (12th Asvin, 1292 B.E.). On this piece of land I have built this four-storied pucca dwelling house at my own expense. The boundaries of this my dwelling house and the land attached to it are as follow :—On the north, the building and

grounds of the Sangit-samaj ; on the east, the house of Babu Bepinbehari Rai ; on the south, our lane and the grounds of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj ; on the west, the house of Babu Deviprasanna Roy Choudury. I alone have been enjoying this land undisputed up to this time. In the lastWilll that my second wife GirijaKumari Devi,made before her death on the 14th December, 1905, she plainly stated that this land was bought and the *pucca* four-storied house on it built at my sole expense. Moreover, before her death she, by that deed, left me after her death, as their sole owner and occupier and competent to sell or give them away. This Wil of my wife was registered according to law in the Calcutta Registrar's Office on the 16th December, 1905.

3. I make over my property, these two *cattahs* of land and the *pucca* four-storied house built on them, to the following five trustees on the following conditions, that is, I appoint two members of my family and three trusted friends of mine as trutees of my property. In my life-time and after my death, two trustees

of this property will be appointed from among the members of my family, that is, my son, my sons-in-law, and in their absence, my grandsons, and in the absence of the latter, their descendants. My son, daughters and sons-in-law, who are at present living, are all zealous in good work. I make this provision so that in future my descendants may be connected with good work—specially with good work inaugurated by me. For the present the following five trustees, two of my family, and three others, will be in charge of this property :—

(*a*) I, Sasipada Bandyopadhyay, shall remain a trustee as long as I am living. In my absence, my son, Albion Rajkumar Bandyopadhyay, M.A., I C.S., Dewan of Cochin, will be appointed a trustee. If, for some reason, my place be not filled by my son, the remaining trustees will fill that place by some son-in-law, grandson or other desendant of mine.

(*b*) I appoint, as the second trustee from my family, my youngest son-in-law, Babu Viswesvar Sen, son of the late Kalidas Sen Mazumdar, now residing at 18, Bhubanmohan sarkar's Lane, and by occupation, the Assis-

tant secretary of the National Chamber of Commerce.

(*c*) I appoint the following three gentlemen as the remaining three trustees.

(1) Babu Ramananda Chattopadhyay, M.A., son of the late Srinath Chattopadhyay, of Bankura, now residing at 210-3-1, Cornwallis street, Calcutta, and Editor of the well-known monthly journals, the M*odern review* and the *Pravasi.*

(2) Mr. Subodhchandra Mahalanabis B. Sc., Professor, Presidency college, son of Babu GurucharanMahalanabis, and of 210 Cornwallis street, Calcutta.

(3) Mr. Prabhatkusam Ray Chauhdri, Barrister-at-law, son of Babu Devi prasanna Roy Chaudhuri, and of 210-4 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.

I appoint the above three gentlemen as the other three trustees of my property. On the place of any one of them being vacant, the board of trustees will fill the vacant place according to their judgment.

When the place of a trustee from my

family becomes vacant, it will be filled by some one from my family. But if, God forbid, no one of my family be found willing or competent to fill that post, the board of trustees will fill it by some member of the Brahma samaj.

For facilitating business, the board of trustees will appoint one of themselves as their secretary, who will discharge all business with the consent of the other trustees.

4. The above mentioned house of mine 210-3-2, Cornwallis street, shall be named the Devalay. This name shall never be changed and no one shall change it.

5. The trustees shall never give away, sell or mortgage this my house. It shall in no way be liable to be sold for any debt or liability of the board of trustees or any particular trustee.

6. The trustees of the Devalay will be at the liberty of letting out the rooms in the second, third and fourth stories of the house for the residence of respectable families.

7. All those who will rent the rooms in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th stories of the Devalay and live therein, should keep in view my object

and the sacredness of the place and endeavour to help the Devalay Association, mentioned in the latter part of this deed.

8. The trustees and the Council of the Devalay should see that the weekly service, which I have instituted for those who now live in the Devalay and the members of the other families in the neighbourhood, continues to be held always. The inmates of this house should join in this service regularly unless prevented by any special cause.

9. No one who drinks wine should be allowed to live in the Devalay and no one should be permitted to take any intoxicating liquor or drug within the limits of the Devalay. The trustees, the committee of the Devalay and the inmates thereof should keep a sharp eye so that no outsider coming to the Devalay may take any intoxicating liquor or drug within the confines of the Devalay.

Affiliated Institutions.

10. I have established in my Devalay an association of the same name. This association was registered in the office of the

Registrar of Companies on the 3rd June, 1908 according to Act XXI of 1860. Its registered number is 268. At the time of registration a copy of the rules of the Association was presented to the Registrar's office. The clause on the objects of the Devalay in the above rules is as follows:—"The Devalay is an Association for devotional exercises and for literary, scientific, philanthropic and charitable work."

11. The board of trustees and the committee of the Devalay Association should, in all that they do, keep these objects in view and should do as much good work as it is possible for the Devalay to do.

12. Every day, God, the one only without a second, the perfect, the infinite, the creator of all, the omnipresent, the omnipotent, the omniscient, the all-good, the perfectly just and the holy, will be worshipped in the Devalay. No created object will be adored here, nor any man, lower animal or inanimate object worshipped as God, as equal to God or an incarnation of God.

13. All ministers, missionaries and workers of all the existing sections of the Brahmo Sa-

maj and of all other sections that may be established in future, as well as all devout theists believing in the worship of God alone and in the efficacy of praying to him alone, will be entitled to conduct service and preach sermons in the Devalay.

14. Just as notwithstanding the internal uniformity of Nature, she presents a great deal of diversity on the surface, so, notwithstanding essential unity in the religious world, there is and will continue to exist, a great variety of internal rites and ceremonies. Variety and diversity in the sphere of external religious rites and ceremonies have prevailed from time immemorial and will prevail in future. When there are no two objects in this vast universe that are not exactly similar in all respects, how can we hope to see perfect unity in the vast concourse of people in this wide universe ? Just as any two men differ in size and form, so do they differ in the out ward expressions of their religion. It is superfluous to say that there is diversity in the religious sentiments of even any two men belonging to the same denomination. When this is the

real state of the religious world, I do not consider it proper to exclude any denomination from the Devalay because of the distinction of outward rites and ceremonies. This Devalay is the meeting place of all religious sects. My sincere desire is that people of all sects should find a place in this Devalay. It is a view to the fulfilment of this object that I keep the door of this Devalay open to all present and future denominations. The trustees should always keep in tact this characteristic of the Devalay.

15. Pious and devout persons of all sects, irrespectively of caste and creed, will be entitled to deliver lectures and addresses in this Devalay. My sincere desire is that pious and devout persons of all sects should consider this Devalay as their own undisputed property. No particular sect should ever consider it as exclusively their own, and have an exclusive possession of it.

16. For conducting and supervising Divine service and philanthropic work, the Devalay will have a committee consisting, besides others, of two representatives of the

board of trustees. The trustees and the council will see that this committee be not composed exclusively of members of one particular denomination. This committee will be appointed for two yers at a time at the annual meeting of the Devalay. The chairman of the annual meeting will inform the board of trustees of the appointment of this committee in due time, that is, within fifteen days of the appointment thereof.

17. This Devalay is established not merely for religious culture; it should be seen that literati, scientists, philanthropists and other earnest workers of the country have free access to it. Equally with religious culture, the culture of morals, science, and literature and the performance of philanthropic deeds may proceed regularly in the Devalay and regular lectures and discourses will be delivered here on these subjects.

18. Innocent amusements are not forbidden in the Devalay. But before allowing such amusements to take place here, authorities of the Devalaya should see that they do not overstep the limits of morality and religion.

19. Smoking is forbidden within the limits of the Devalay meeting place.

20. In the services, addresses, discussions, sermons and even conversations taking place in the Devalay no one shall be allowed to vilify, mock or ridicule any religion, religious doctrine, religious sect, or any community or individual, or use any contemptuous or insulting words with reference to any one. There shall be no lectures or discussions on political subjects in any meetings of the Devalay. The board of trustees will have this preventive clause engraved on a marble-slab and put it in an open place in the Devalay.

21. I have been trying for a long time past and in various ways to train young children from their infancy in religion and morality. With this object I founded a number of institutions in my native village of Barahanagar. After the establishment of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj I used, for a time, to address young boys and girls on morals and religion in connection with the Sunday school. During the service in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj *Mandir*, little children who

cannot join in the service disturb others in their devotions in various ways. To remove this inconvenience, and with a view to provide for the training of young children from their very infancy in religion and morality, I established an association under the name of the Balya Samaj in 1899 in a lower room of my house at 210-3-2, Cornwallis Street. The work of this association has been going on regularly in this Devalay ever since the day of its foundation. In future the Devalay shall be considered the fixed place for the meeting of the Balya Samaj, which should never be removed from this place. But if in future the work of the Balya Samaj should be extended so far that the Devalay should be found too small a place for it, the board of trustees and the council may provide for removing this inconvenience. The workers of the Bàlya Samáj as well as the children constituting its membership should, in all the proceedings of their association, keep in view the sacredness and seriousness of the Devalay. The conductors of the Balya Samaj should send an annual report of their work in November

every year for incorporation in the annual report of the Devalay.

22. In the 6th clause, it has been provided that the rooms in the second, third and fourth stories of the Devalay may be let out. From the monthly rent obtained for these rooms, the trustees should after paying the Municipal and other taxes, and laying by an annual amount of Rs. 50 (fifty only) for reparing the house, make over to the council Rs. 25 (twentyfive only) a month and deposit in the postal Savings Bank an amount of Rs. 100 (one hundred only) a year in the name of the Sasipada Bandyopadhyay Devalay Fund. The balance remaining after expenses may be spent by the trustees in any special work connected with the Devalay or given away at their discretion for some philanthropic work. The fifty rupees to be laid by for the annual repair of the house may not always be required for the purpose. In that case the balance shall accumulate and be spent in a special repair of the honse every five years. The hundred rupees to be annualy laid by in the Bank may be spent in a thorough

repair of the house in case any such repair be necessitated by some acccidental calamity. All the amount that will remain after the monthly expenses of the Devalay should be deposited in the Savings Bank. On every accumulation of a hundred rupees, a Government Promissory Note shall be bought and deposited in the office of the Comptroller of Post offices.

23. The little money I have provided for conducting the regular work of the Devalay and for the repair of the house will not be quite sufficient for these purposes. Accordingly my humble request to the board of trustees and the council of the Devalay is that they should endeavour from time to time to collect subscriptions and special donations for the proper performance of these works.

Final Appeal.

24. The board of trustees and the Council of the Devalay will see that the following works, which I have provided for, may regularly proceed without let or hindrance, namely, (1) The singing of *sangits* and *sankirtan* once

a week, (2) a weekly Divine Service, and (3) a monthly public meeting and address on literary, scientific, religious, moral and philanthropic subjects. I need hardly say that the provision of Rs. 25 a month, made by me for the Devalay, should be spent chiefly for these works.

25. I write this deed in perfect reliance on God, the perfectly good, and in the hope that his holy will will be fulfilled by this Devalay.

Witness

Kumudvihari Roy,
210,-Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Adharchandra Mazumdar,
210-3, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Radhacharan Sen,
211, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Deviprasanna Ray Choudhury,
210-4, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Sitanath Datta,
210-3-2, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Manilal Ghosh,
210-3, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.
Probodhchandra Mahalanabis,
210, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.

1st January, 1909.
17th Paush, 1315 B.E.

* This trust-deed has been registered in the Calcutta Sub-registrar's office on the 6th day of January, 1909.

DATE DUE

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